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Latin America Review

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LATIN AMERICA REVIEW

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The government's intention to step up drug control operations in the Guajira region of northeastern Colombia could bring an unfavorable reaction from neighboring Venezuela, since the area is the locale of a longstanding and emotional border dispute.

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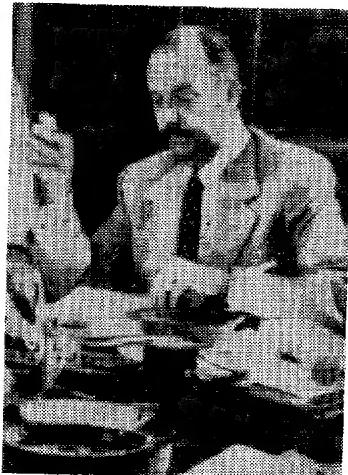
Nicaragua: Scenarios for Somoza's Sudden Departure

With the political conflict in Nicaragua approaching complete polarization, the prospect for an internally generated compromise along moderate lines is increasingly remote. We continue to believe that over the coming months, barring an unforeseeable shift in events or involvement by an outside force, President Somoza will probably be able to remain in power. He will not be able to end the cycle of determined and sometimes violent opposition, but neither are his opponents likely to topple his government. In light of the highly fluid situation, predictions of such eventualities are clearly speculative, and other possibilities deserve examination. Chief among these other, less-likely scenarios is Somoza's precipitate departure from office--through death, assassination, or resignation.

Somoza's sudden absence from the scene would leave an immense power vacuum. Present circumstances suggest that an unanticipated void would most likely be filled by the National Guard or the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), the two elements with the physical



Major Anastasio
"Tachito" Somoza



President Anastasio
Somoza Debayle



General
Jose R. Somoza

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might to prevail in an unsettled atmosphere. Somoza's death or assassination would favor a Guard takeover, while his precipitate resignation would suggest circumstances in which the Sandinistas could carry the day. In short, his unstructured departure would simply compound the polarization and make succession by one of the extremes more likely.

Natural Death

In the event of Somoza's sudden natural death, his power structure--family, National Guard, Liberal Party--would move to protect its interests through continued control of the government. This could best be achieved through constitutional succession because pro-Somoza elements control such a process and can ensure that it operates in their favor, and it will give a facade of legitimacy and is probably the only hope of minimizing adverse reaction from the US and the world.

The National Guard would be the power broker. Somoza's son, Major Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza, and his half-brother, General Jose R. Somoza, would abide by the constitutional ban on their taking office, but they would effectively hold real power. The facade of legitimacy would be thin because the constitution has been a Somoza tool, and it would produce a puppet president. Nevertheless, this would be preferable to outright circumvention or alteration of the constitution, which the Somozas probably recognize would help galvanize the opposition.

The Minister of Government would take over the official reins of government, and Congress--60-percent controlled by Somoza's Liberal Party--would convene and name a substitute president to serve out the term. Senate President Pablo Rener is a likely candidate.

Given the current unstable situation in Nicaragua, this process might have difficulty proceeding in orderly fashion. Of the various ways Somoza might leave office, however, natural death would probably have the least galvanizing effect on his opponents and would offer the best opportunity for the Somoza power structure to perpetuate itself.

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Even if challenged, the Somozas and the Guard would probably try to see it through constitutionally, while acting unilaterally and independently to keep order and control. Pro-Somoza civilian politicians might try to defuse the situation by negotiating with the opposition, perhaps to come up with a coalition government. But the Guard might perceive opposition participation in a successor government as a threat to its interests or as a sign of the inability of Liberal politicians to maintain authority. The National Guard might, therefore, subvert the process and impose an alternative succession: a military junta, a mixed civilian-military regime, or a military chief of government.

Assassination

If President Somoza were assassinated, the circumstances would probably differ only in degree. The surviving Somozas and the Guard would still seek to prevail, but angered by the assassination, they would perhaps be less concerned with the cosmetics of the succession, and a more forceful counter-subversion effort could be expected. Neither Jose R. nor Tachito would be as insistent on Guard restraint in dealing with the opposition as is the current President, and more human rights abuses would probably result. Moreover, there would be even less inclination to permit the moderate opposition a voice in government affairs.

Over the longer term, the prospects that either Jose R. or Major Somoza would retain de facto authority are uncertain. Jose R.--although acting commander of the Guard--is regarded more a short-term successor because of age, poor health, and a lack of intelligence and ambition.

Tachito, on the other hand, has the ability and probably the inclination to fill his father's shoes. He is only 26 years old, however, and has only been a member of the Guard for a few years, so that he has not had the opportunity to develop the loyalty that his father and uncle enjoy. He may also have engendered some jealousy among senior officers because of his occasionally brash ways and his privileged position. He is nonetheless clearly building a base of personal loyalty not only in the junior officer corps but with enlistees through his position as commander of the Infantry Basic Training

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School. It is only a question of time before his succession is secured. Certainly, the leadership of the Guard expects another Somoza to continue the line of succession and, over time, Tachito is clearly the chosen one. In an immediate crisis, Tachito might well play a key leadership role, even though acting through Jose. R.

Resignation

Somoza's resignation could come about under any of a variety of circumstances. Clearly, what follows depends on the conditions that lead him to step down. Ideally, he would be persuaded that an orderly departure based on a compromise with the opposition offers the best chance of averting the extremes of a military take-over or a victory by the Marxist FSLN.

Given Somoza's determination to hold on, however, it would most probably take concerted Sandinista attacks coupled with mass civil uprisings and a withdrawal of US support to force him from power. If Somoza were to flee Nicaragua under such circumstances, it would spur his activist opponents forward in hopes of delivering the coup de grace to the existing power structure. At the same time, Somoza's supporters in the Guard and Liberal Party, deserted by their leader, would be demoralized. Presumably, Jose R. and Tachito and most of the leadership of the regime would join him in exile, though pockets of resistance could form in Managua.

Although moderate opposition leaders might then step onto the stage and attempt to wrest control of the movement from those in the streets, the Sandinistas would clearly have the advantage. By virtue of their weapons, their more cohesive leadership, and their popularity and image as the only opposition force capable of taking direct action, they would be in the best position to marshal the armed masses. The Sandinistas are the heroes of the youths who will be in the streets and occupying the government buildings. In the immediate aftermath, the FSLN might even turn directly to Cuba for material aid and guidance in consolidating its position.

The FSLN guerrillas might wish to establish the facade of a broad-based coalition government in order to present an image of legitimacy, but they would have little incentive to relinquish to moderates the control

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won by their guns and their youthful followers. The FSLN has fought for 15 years to wrest power from Somoza and is not likely to hand it over to opposition politicians who are basically moderate, capitalist, and unsympathetic to the FSLN's revolutionary cause.

Somoza could conceivably resign under less drastic circumstances; he could see the writing on the wall before there was a mass civil uprising in Managua. He could relinquish power to the Guard leadership, which would still feel deserted, but which might have enough of a breather to draw together with the other remnants of Somoza's government. At that point, circumstances might have so deteriorated that their only hope for survival would be to negotiate with the moderate opposition to form a compromise successor government. The moderate opposition might be motivated to agree out of fear that nothing else could halt a takeover by the radicals.

In short, it ought to be apparent to the Guard and to the moderate opposition that their interests would be served by averting an Armageddon. The problem with this more moderate scenario is that all this ought to be apparent to these groups and Somoza now, but it has not moved any of them to the bargaining table.

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Panama: Torrijos Takes a Half-Step Back

Panamanian leader Omar Torrijos' announcement last week that he will relinquish his post as chief of government--his term expires on 11 October--and not seek the presidency still leaves him in de facto control as commandant of the National Guard. General Torrijos could backtrack on his decision, but a lower profile for both himself and the military would probably suit the Panamanian strongman personally and politically for the moment. The move increases the possibility that Torrijos could be a presidential candidate in direct elections in 1984 or sooner, however, since there would be fewer image problems than if he had occupied the top spot for 16 uninterrupted years.

Torrijos' Decision

The key to Torrijos' grip on power since 1968 has been his position as commandant of the National Guard, and he apparently intends to retain that post indefinitely. Torrijos' simultaneous "proposal" that Education Minister Royo become the next president--to be elected by the legislative assembly in October--leaves little doubt as to who will be calling the shots.

Several factors could have motivated Torrijos' decision. He has never cared for the ceremonial and bureaucratic aspects of the presidency, which tend to inhibit his freewheeling style. Moreover, by retiring from his post as chief of government, Torrijos would meet one of the opposition's complaints about the special constitutional powers granted him in 1972. This could facilitate the government's dialogue with opposition parties about a new political opening. The post of Chief of Government was established as a special six-year "transition" provision of the 1972 constitution, and Torrijos' continuance would have required a constitutional amendment that would have spotlighted his all-encompassing powers.

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In keeping with his efforts to foster a new image, Panama's leader also announced that the National Guard would "pull back" from the top level of government. While the Guard has been constitutionally recognized as a fourth branch of government since 1972, it has primarily exercised an oversight role in national policymaking. Only one cabinet minister, for instance, is a military officer. With the canal treaties settled and their implementation requiring greater inputs of technical expertise, the military can well afford to assume a lower political profile at the national level.

Nevertheless, this is unlikely to change Torrijos' practice of bypassing the civilian structure, such as calling upon intelligence chief Lieutenant Colonel Noriega for a variety of domestic and foreign policy tasks. Furthermore, the Guard functions as the government's political arm at the provincial and local level, and will continue to do so. Relaxing his hold on day-to-day responsibilities will be difficult for Torrijos, since all decisions have been passed to the Panamanian strongman for the past 10 years.

Toward Political Freedoms

The extent of liberalization remains unknown, but in some areas Torrijos is continuing to loosen domestic controls. The commission on political reform, composed of government representatives and some opposition party delegates, recently proposed that Torrijos' 505-man legislative assembly be retained, but also that a popularly elected National Legislative Commission be formed. The present Legislative Commission has such law-making power as now exists, but almost all of its members are appointed by Torrijos. A second proposal would provide for a direct presidential election, which Torrijos has said he would not oppose in 1984.

These still fuzzy recommendations are far from being implemented. Even so, their mere consideration--like Torrijos' decision five months ago to allow political exiles to return--shows that as long as his ultimate authority is unchallenged, the General will allow domestic politicking. His overall political plan exists only in his head, however, and--like the man--is subject to quick changes.

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Outlook

The legislative assembly could still "draft" Torrijos for president in response to the "popular will." Several organizations under the control of the pro-government Communist Party have already called for Torrijos to retain his post. This does not indicate a Machiavellian scheme on Torrijos' part, since progovernment organizations can be expected to request Torrijos' continued leadership as a matter of course.

The choice of the left-leaning Royo as president, however, will disquiet the business community. So far, Panama's entrepreneurs are undecided whether to speak out, especially since they are unsure of Torrijos' real plans. In addition, while the Royo candidacy is unsettling, businessmen have accepted far worse from Torrijos in the past.

Torrijos may expect that his vice presidential choice--the conservatively oriented head of the National Bank, Ricardo de la Espriella--will strike a balance. With the recent departure of the influential moderate Minister of Planning Barletta for a job in Washington, however, the administration's leftist advisers appear even more prominent.

If substantial opposition to Royo develops--which does not seem likely at this stage--Torrijos is capable of backtracking. In making his announcement, for example, the Panamanian leader stated that the acceptance of Royo rested solely with the assembly. Aside from his effort to embellish the legislature's nonexistent authority, there was an element of truth in Torrijos' suggestion that his announcement was not necessarily final. None of the General's decisions is ever set in concrete. While Royo's candidacy is more than a trial balloon, Torrijos has once again held himself above the process so that, if necessary, he can reverse himself without any significant loss of personal prestige.

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Bolivia: Pereda and the Election Game

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The issue of rescheduling a presidential election continues to dominate the political scene in Bolivia as opposition parties and ex-President Banzer try to force President Pereda's hand. All major political parties have rejected Pereda's earlier offer to hold an election in January 1980. Instead, they are demanding that he set a firm date now for an election in the first half of next year and that he initiate major electoral reforms. So far, Pereda has refused to be bound by a specific timetable--especially one that would immediately make him a "lame duck"--although he has reiterated his intention to lead the nation toward democracy. This tactic may buy Pereda the time he needs to strengthen his administration, but his hold on power remains tenuous.

1,2,3
A joint communique issued on 23 August by representatives of the major political parties incorporates criticisms and suggestions voiced by international observers immediately following the abortive national election two months ago. Specifically, the parties insist on replacing the individual ballots that were used for each political party with a single-sheet, multi-color, multi-insignia ballot in order to reduce fraud and voter manipulation. In addition, the communique advocates "democratic expression" for all minority parties--including extremist groups--reinstitution of a system of proportional representation in Congress, increased opposition representation on the national electoral court that oversees the election, and an ending to the prohibition against labor leaders running for office. This last provision could enable Juan Lechin, the highly popular leader of the tin miners, to return from exile and seek the presidency.

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These recommendations, if adopted and conscientiously applied, would reduce irregularities and probably make future elections more democratic, especially in La Paz and other major cities. Elsewhere in the country, however, geographic and cultural isolation inhibits both

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the communication and enforcement of electoral reform measures. The poverty and illiteracy of Bolivia's predominantly Indian population make it highly susceptible to bribes and threats by local political bosses.

1,5
In spite of these conditions, Pereda has been placed on the defensive by the opposition parties which have not only seized the initiative but have enlisted international sentiment in favor of democracy. If he fails to deliver a constructive response, he will find it more difficult to build support for his government at home and to get badly needed international loans and other economic assistance.

3,5
Former President Banzer, whom Pereda forced out of office in a bloodless coup in July, has also been playing the election game. Although ostensibly retired from political life, Banzer told a group of reporters last month that he favors a presidential election sometime next year. Banzer proposed that no ex-president or vice president, and no active or "semiretired" military officer be eligible to run for office. While this proposal would disqualify both Banzer and Pereda, it would also eliminate all leading opposition candidates who participated in the last election and is therefore highly unlikely to be accepted. Banzer's apparent purpose in making such an impractical suggestion is to keep his name before the public and to be able to claim that he tried to take the high road of statesmanship only to have this course rejected by the political parties.

In any event, there is no evidence that the majority of officers in the Bolivian military, upon whom enforcement of the laws ultimately depends, are committed to electoral reforms or that they favor the idea of holding a national election anytime soon. Nevertheless, the focus on elections seems to have kept Pereda off balance and susceptible to pressure by his opponents. In the month and a half since he came to power, he has not taken any initiatives that have inspired public confidence nor has he defined his policy objectives. His failure to put the election issue behind him only reinforces the image of a weak and indecisive government that lacks the support of those not directly connected with it.

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Colombia: Drug Control Effort May Lead to Border Tension

The Colombian Government has requested US logistic support to carry out drug control operations in the Guajira region of northeastern Colombia. In a recent meeting with US Ambassador Asencio, Defense Minister General Camacho reiterated the intention of the new administration to act forcefully against drug trafficking. He repeated President Turbay's proposal to Secretary Blumenthal for a dramatic show of force by interdicting or destroying aircraft illegally entering the Guajira Peninsula. He added that a battalion of troops was available to carry out the operations in the region but that the government needed fuel, spare parts, and sophisticated communications and radar equipment. Camacho assigned the armed forces commander, General Sarmiento, to work with US personnel in drawing up a program of action and a budget.

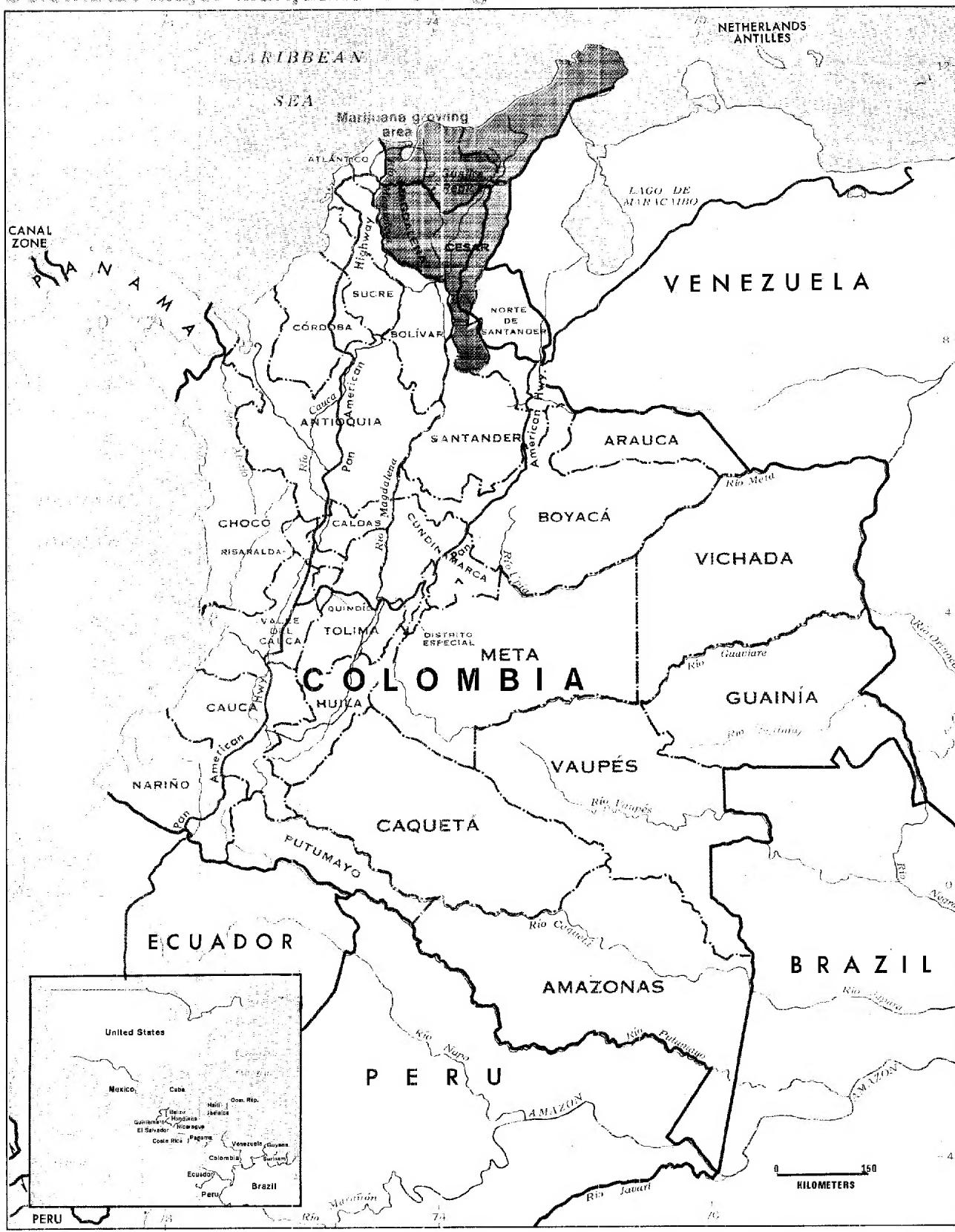
The Colombians are obviously intent on demonstrating their commitment to curb drug trafficking in an area that has become a major center for marijuana cultivation and cocaine export. They do not appear to be taking into consideration, however, the reaction of neighboring Venezuela to what, in effect, would be the militarization of an area that figures prominently in a longstanding and emotional border dispute between the two nations. The Guajira Peninsula and adjacent offshore territories have been the subject of conflicting claims since the late 1880s, and the ill-defined border area has frequently been the scene of minor skirmishes.

The Venezuelan military have traditionally viewed their Colombian counterparts with suspicion. Many Venezuelans accept as an article of faith that Colombia harbors aggressive intentions on oil-rich western Venezuela. They will regard any abnormal increase in

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Colombia: Major Marijuana Growing Area

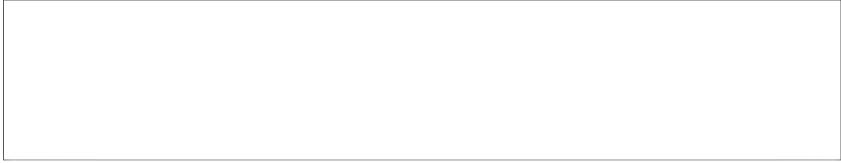


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military strength along the border as potentially hostile. Moreover, Venezuela is now in the throes of a closely fought general election campaign that could provide a forum for a renewal of anti-Colombian feelings, particularly if one of the major parties senses that political capital could be made.

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FOR THE RECORD

VENEZUELA-CUBA-USSR: An oil swap arrangement between Caracas and Moscow is now being fully implemented. On 19 August, the Soviet petroleum supplier, NAFTA, sent the first shipment of crude oil to Venezuela's customers in Spain. At the same time, a subsidiary of the Venezuelan State Petroleum Company began lifting Venezuelan heavy crude for Cuba. Under terms of the bilateral agreement agreed to this summer--an "agreement in principle" had been initialed when President Perez visited Moscow in November 1976--Venezuela is to provide a portion of Cuba's crude oil requirements, and the Soviets will deliver a like amount for Venezuela's European market. Thus far, almost 500,000 barrels of Venezuelan crude have been delivered to Cuban ports. Shipping schedules indicate that the Venezuelans are adhering to a once-a-month delivery schedule. If this rate continues, Venezuelan crude oil deliveries to Cuba will reach approximately 10,000 barrels daily--about 8 percent of Cuba's daily crude requirements.

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